Where the Self Places Conflict

Reality Resistance, Organism–Environment Coupling, and Conditional Return

A VIVENS State-Space-Inspired Research Framework

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is commonly studied through stress exposure, appraisal, coping, emotion regulation, control, trauma, or goal pursuit. This paper proposes a complementary unit of analysis: the bidirectionally coupled organism–environment process through which incompatible organizations are appraised, functionally allocated, represented, acted upon, bodily realized, and updated.

The framework distinguishes **reality resistance**—a mismatch between an expected, desired, defended, or identity-compatible organization and encountered conditions—from **conflict**, defined as an incompatibility among simultaneously activated goals, valuations, action tendencies, relational demands, or possible organizations that cannot all be satisfied. "Placement" denotes the emergent allocation of cause, responsibility, threat, agency, and possible action; it does not imply conscious choice.

The model separates a latent organismic state, a slower memory–identity state, and an environmental–relational state containing externally assessable threat, resources, rules, support, power, and available action affordances. Response operations may or may not become enacted action. Action and external events modify the environment, whose transformed state contributes to the next organismic state. Reports, behavior, physiology, and contextual events are treated as imperfect observations rather than as the latent states themselves.

The central construct is **conditional coupled return potential**: the probability that a defined organism–environment system will enter a prespecified set of viable configurations within a given timescale, conditional on its starting state, perturbation, resources, constraints, and intervention. The proposed contribution is conflict-specific integration of functional allocation, representation, action, environmental transformation, identity, and multiscale return.

The first candidate mechanism is limited to experimentally imposed absence of an effective response option, perseverative cognitive–affective operation, and delayed autonomic and endocrine recovery. The framework is empirically separable from its VIVENS ontological interpretation and rejects psychological reductionism, patient blame, and direct attribution of disease to unresolved conflict.

Keywords: conflict; reality resistance; organism–environment coupling; state-space framework; functional allocation; representational profile; action affordance; conditional return; resilience; VIVENS.

1. Introduction

Human conflict is usually approached as opposition between persons, groups, interests, values, intentions, or identities. In psychological and biological research, conflict-related phenomena are often translated into stress exposure, threat, frustration, aggression, trauma, coping, repetitive cognition,

emotion regulation, or psychopathology.

These approaches are indispensable, but they leave open a more elementary question:

> ***What organization does conflict acquire in the coupling between an organism and the conditions through which it must continue to live?***

The question is not whether a person is aggressive, peaceful, avoidant, expressive, resilient, or silent. It asks what incompatibility is active; what is appraised as relevant, uncertain, or irreversible; where cause, responsibility, threat, agency, and possible action are allocated; whether the conflict becomes detectable and revisable; what operations occur; whether prepared operations become effective action; how action alters the environment; and whether the next coupled state updates or repeats the preceding organization.

The central hypothesis is narrower than the general proposition that stress affects health:

> ***The biological and behavioral significance of conflict may depend not only on exposure and intensity, but on the coupled transitions through which organism and environment permit, block, or redirect updating.***

The end of an external event does not necessarily coincide with the end of organismic mobilization. Rumination can delay cardiovascular recovery, perseverative cognition can prolong stress-related activation, experimentally manipulated controllability can alter neural responses under matched exposure, and affective dynamics can be decomposed into exposure, reactivity, recovery, and inertia (Glynn et al., 2002; Brosschot et al., 2006; Limbachia et al., 2021; Koval et al., 2015). These findings do not establish the present framework. They establish the more limited premise that post-event trajectory matters and cannot be inferred from event intensity alone.

The proposed unit of analysis is therefore **bidirectional conflict-state coupling**.

2. Conceptual Distinctions

2.1. Reality resistance

Reality resistance is the relational mismatch between an expected, desired, defended, or identity-compatible organization and the conditions actually encountered.

The term does not assign intention to reality. Resistance may arise from another person, the body, time, loss, refusal, illness, material deprivation, institutional constraint, social hierarchy, ecological conditions, or irreversible change.

Reality resistance can produce surprise, disappointment, pain, learning, or immediate adaptation without producing conflict.

2.2. Conflict

Conflict is an incompatibility among simultaneously activated goals, valuations, action tendencies, relational demands, or possible organizations that cannot all be satisfied under the conditions encountered.

Examples include:

- speaking or preserving safety;
- defending a boundary or maintaining a relationship;
- continuing a goal or disengaging;
- remaining loyal or acknowledging harm;

- preserving identity continuity or revising the identity that continuity requires;
- acting against injustice or avoiding consequences that make action impossible.

Conflict contains no necessary duration. Persistence, recurrence, generalization, and identity incorporation belong to its subsequent trajectory.

2.3. Conflict is not stress or aggression

Not every stressor generates conflict, and not every conflict generates intense stress. Conflict is also distinct from aggression, competition, hostility, defense, violence, and bellicism. Visible confrontation may be proportionate to real danger; apparent calm may express cooperation, inhibition, submission, dissociation, or lack of viable action.

The framework therefore distinguishes:

$$\text{encountered mismatch} \neq \text{conflict} \neq \text{stress response} \neq \text{persistent trajectory}$$

No moral hierarchy is assigned to external versus internal, expressive versus silent, or confrontational versus peaceful responses. The relevant questions concern accuracy, proportionality, context, real action possibility, updating, and termination.

3. Bidirectional Coupled-State Architecture

The framework is **state-space-inspired**, not an identified mathematical model. Its notation constrains explanation by requiring the organism, the environment, action, history, and observation to remain analytically distinct.

3.1. System boundary

Every empirical study must declare its system boundary $\mathscr{B}$. Depending on the research question, the modeled system may include:

1. the organism;
2. an immediate relationship or small group;
3. an institution;
4. selected socioecological conditions.

Processes beyond the declared boundary enter as external events. The framework does not attempt to place all social reality inside one model.

3.2. Latent organismic state

At time t, the conflict-relevant organismic state is represented as:

$$\mathbf{x}_t = \left(\mathbf{a}_t, \boldsymbol{\lambda}_t, \boldsymbol{\rho}_t, \boldsymbol{\phi}_t\right)$$

where:

- $\mathbf{a}_t$ is appraisal;
- $\boldsymbol{\lambda}_t$ is the functional allocation profile;
- $\boldsymbol{\rho}_t$ is the representational profile;
- $\boldsymbol{\phi}_t$ is physiological organization and action readiness.

This state is not the whole organism. It is a theoretical representation of variables relevant to a defined conflict.

3.3. Slow memory–identity state

A slower organismic state is represented as:

$$\mathbf{m}_t = \big(\text{learning},\ \text{habit},\ \text{identity},\\ \text{incorporated relational history},\ \text{persistent physiological dispositions}\big)$$

Identity is therefore both a possible result of previous trajectories and a constraint on later appraisal, allocation, representation, and action.

3.4. Environmental–relational state

The state of the modeled environment is represented as:

$$\mathbf{w}_t = \big(\text{externally assessable threat},\ \text{relationship configuration},\\ \text{resources},\ \text{support},\ \text{rules},\ \text{power},\\ \text{available action affordances and constraints}\big)$$

The environmental state is conceptually distinct from what the person believes about it. Independently assessable action affordances, institutional permissions, material resources, and documented threats belong here rather than inside subjective appraisal.

3.5. Response organization and enacted action

The organization of response operations is represented provisionally as:

$$\omega_t = \mathscr{P}\left(\mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{m}_t, \mathbf{w}_t\right)$$

$\mathscr{P}$ is not necessarily conscious. It may organize automatic defense, habitual avoidance, reappraisal, action preparation, negotiation, or environmental modification.

Prepared operations do not automatically become action:

$$\mathbf{u}_t = \mathscr{J}\left(\omega_t, \mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{w}_t\right) + \boldsymbol{\eta}_t$$

where $\boldsymbol{\eta}_t$ represents inhibition, incapacity, timing failure, unmodeled obstacles, or noise.

This distinction separates wanting, preparing, being permitted, having an opportunity, acting, and producing an effective environmental change.

3.6. Bidirectional transition

The environment changes through action and external events:

$$\mathbf{w}_{t+1} = \mathscr{H}\left(\mathbf{w}_t, \mathbf{u}_t, \boldsymbol{\xi}_t\right)$$

The organismic state then updates through the transformed environment:

$$\mathbf{x}_{t+1} = \mathscr{T}\left(\mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{m}_t, \mathbf{w}_{t+1}, \boldsymbol{\omega}_t, \mathbf{u}_t\right)$$

Repeated transitions modify the slow state:

$$\mathbf{m}_{t+1} = \mathscr{K}\left(\mathbf{m}_t, \mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{w}_t, \boldsymbol{\omega}_t, \mathbf{u}_t, \mathbf{x}_{t+1}, \mathbf{w}_{t+1}\right)$$

The coupled state is:

$$\mathbf{s}_t = \left(\mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{m}_t, \mathbf{w}_t\right)$$

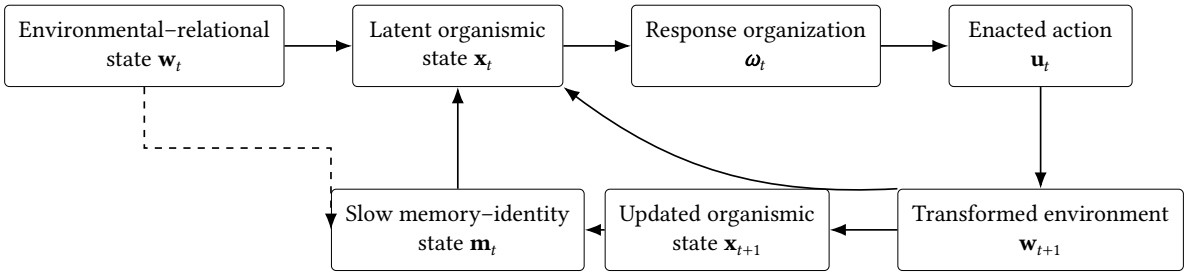

Figure 1. Bidirectional conflict-state coupling. The environment contributes to the current organismic state; response organization may become action; action and external events transform the environment; the transformed environment contributes to the next organismic state; repeated transitions modify slower memory and identity.

The diagram is conceptual. It does not imply one universal temporal resolution or a fully identified quantitative model.

3.7. State and observation

Latent states are not directly observed. Organismic and environmental observations are represented as:

$$\mathbf{y}_t^O = \mathscr{G}_O\left(\mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{m}_t, \boldsymbol{\omega}_t, \mathbf{u}_t\right) + \boldsymbol{\varepsilon}_t^O$$

$$\mathbf{y}_t^W = \mathscr{G}_W\left(\mathbf{w}_t\right) + \boldsymbol{\varepsilon}_t^W$$

Possible indicators include reports, narratives, behavior, recorded interactions, heart rate, respiration, cortisol, sleep, movement, available resources, formal rules, sanctions, and independent observations.

Measurement in intensive longitudinal data requires separation of trait, state, and error, as well as attention to within-person reliability and temporal invariance (McNeish et al., 2021). Dynamic models do not repair weak measurement.

4. Core State Components

4.1. Appraisal

Appraisal is restricted to the perceived significance and structure of the encounter:

$$\mathbf{a}_t = (\text{relevance}, \text{valence}, \text{novelty}, \text{uncertainty}, \text{irreversibility}, \text{perceived incompatibility})$$

Appraisal need not be wholly conscious or linguistic. Transactional theories already relate appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes (Folkman et al., 1986). The present question is whether appraisal interacts with allocation, representation, physiology, independently assessed action affordance, and slow identity in ways that improve explanation.

4.2. Functional allocation profile

The allocation profile is:

$$\begin{aligned}\lambda_t = \big(&\text{perceived causal locus},\ \text{attributed responsibility},\\ &\text{perceived source of threat},\ \text{perceived locus of possible action},\\ &\text{perceived control distribution}\big)\end{aligned}$$

Cause, responsibility, threat, action, and control can be allocated differently. A person may attribute cause externally, accept partial responsibility, locate possible action internally, and correctly recognize institutional limits.

Attribution and locus-of-control theories already study cause, stability, controllability, and the expected relation between action and outcome (Rotter, 1966; Weiner, 1985). The proposed addition is the simultaneous profile and its revision through repeated organism–environment transitions.

4.3. Representational profile

The representational profile is:

$$\begin{aligned}\rho_t = \big(&\text{detection},\ \text{differentiation},\ \text{conceptualization},\\ &\text{bodily linkage},\ \text{articulation},\ \text{revisability}\big)\end{aligned}$$

The profile concerns whether incompatibility can be detected, differentiated, provisionally organized, related to bodily change, articulated, and revised. It does not equate narrative fluency with accuracy.

Relational expressibility belongs partly to the environment: a conflict may be internally articulable but unsafe to communicate.

This profile overlaps with emotional awareness, alexithymia, affect differentiation, mentalization, metacognition, interoceptive awareness, and narrative coherence. Established instruments already measure important portions of this territory (Lane et al., 1990; Bagby et al., 1994; Mehling et al., 2012). The proposed profile must demonstrate discriminant and incremental validity rather than rename existing constructs.

4.4. Physiological organization and interoception

ϕ_t may include autonomic, endocrine, respiratory, vascular, muscular, biomechanical, pain-related, fatigue-related, sleep-related, and—where temporally justified—immune organization.

Physiological state must be distinguished from afferent signal, access to that signal, and interpretation. The same bodily configuration may be detected, ignored, or interpreted differently.

Active and interoceptive inference already relate bodily prediction, sensory evidence, action, emotion, and embodied selfhood (Seth, 2013; Seth & Friston, 2016). The present framework is narrower: it addresses conflict among incompatible organizations under relational and material constraints.

4.5. Response operations

Response operations may be:

- automatic or partially involuntary: freezing, attentional capture, dissociative detachment, habitual avoidance;
- regulatory: reappraisal, suppression, differentiation, symbolization, acceptance, narrative reconstruction;
- action-preparatory: approach, withdrawal, confrontation, boundary defense, help-seeking, disengagement;
- relational or environmental: negotiation, repair, co-regulation, redistribution of responsibility, institutional or material modification.

No operation is universally adaptive. Expression, suppression, reappraisal, and direct action can help or harm depending on controllability, danger, timing, resources, audience, and intended aim (Bonanno et al., 2004; Troy et al., 2013; Bonanno & Burton, 2013).

5. Timescale, Trajectory, and Viability

5.1. Nested timescales

The coupled process contains multiple rates:

- **fast:** perceptual appraisal, autonomic change, motor preparation, immediate defense;
- **intermediate:** rumination, cortisol recovery, sleep, repeated interaction, strategy revision;
- **slow:** identity, habits, relationship structure, institutional position, economic dependence, persistent physiological dispositions, and tissue history.

Repetition or sustained coupling of fast states may contribute to slower change under specified mediating conditions. Fast, intermediate, and slow components may recover asynchronously.

5.2. Trajectory

A trajectory is the ordered sequence:

$$\mathcal{Q}_{t_0:t_n} = \{\mathbf{s}_{t_0}, \mathbf{s}_{t_1}, \dots, \mathbf{s}_{t_n}\}$$

It includes order, duration, context, intervention, environmental transitions, and divergence points.

Descriptive properties may include termination, generalization, identity embedding, and context dependence. Causal or dynamical properties—such as causal dependence, transition thresholds, metastability, and hysteresis—require stronger designs.

Slow recovery is not hysteresis. Hysteresis requires different states under equivalent environmental conditions depending on the path through which those conditions were reached.

5.3. Viability

For a declared boundary $\mathcal{B}$, define a set of viable configurations:

$$\mathcal{V}_{\mathcal{B}}$$

Viability cannot be equated with comfort, compliance, social normality, symptom absence, or restoration of the pre-conflict state. Depending on the study, criteria may include essential physiological

function, safety, sufficient autonomy, ability to respond to current demands, context discrimination, behavioral range, access to legitimate goals, and absence of escalating mobilization without present necessity.

Criteria must be prespecified, domain-specific, ethically justified, and open to several viable outcomes.

6. Conditional Coupled Return Potential

The framework replaces a global internal capacity with a conditional probability:

$$\tau_{\mathscr{V}} = \inf\{\tau > 0 : \mathbf{s}_{t+\tau} \in \mathscr{V}_{\mathscr{B}}\}$$

$$\mathscr{R}^{\mathscr{B}}_{\Delta t} = \Pr\left[\tau_{\mathscr{V}} \leq \Delta t \mid \mathbf{s}_t, \mathfrak{p}, \mathfrak{i}, \mathscr{B}\right]$$

where:

- $\mathbf{s}_t$ is the starting coupled state;
- $\mathfrak{p}$ is the perturbation class;
- $\mathfrak{i}$ denotes intervention or available transition conditions;
- Δt is the time horizon;
- $\mathscr{V}_{\mathscr{B}}$ is the prespecified viable set.

Here, $\tau_{\mathscr{V}}$ is the first-entry time into the prespecified viable set. This expression is conceptual rather than a universal estimable formula. When a study requires sustained rather than momentary return, the event must also include a prespecified minimum dwell time or stability criterion inside $\mathscr{V}_{\mathscr{B}}$.

"Potential" is preferred to "capacity" because return depends on the starting state, environment, resources, action possibilities, timescale, and availability of more than one viable outcome.

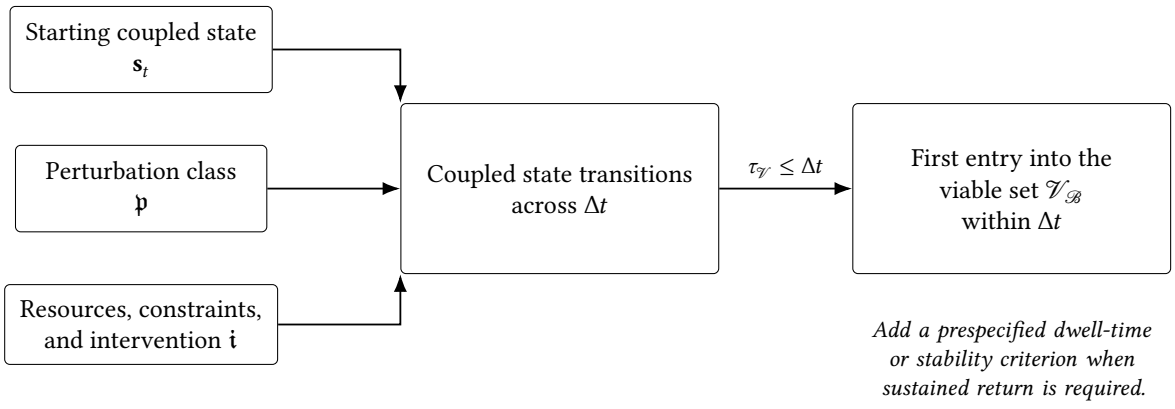

Figure 2. Conditional coupled return. Return potential is defined for a specified system boundary, starting state, perturbation, intervention conditions, viable set, and time horizon.

One recovery or one failure cannot justify a global judgment about a person. Return potential must be estimated for defined perturbations, contexts, boundaries, and timescales.

7. Position Among Existing Frameworks

The present framework is integrative and must be evaluated against established theories rather than by resemblance alone.

7.1. Transactional stress and coping

Transactional models already connect appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes (Folkman et al., 1986). The present framework adds explicit profiles of allocation and representation, separates response organization from enacted action, models environmental transition, and includes slow identity and memory.

7.2. Cybernetic control theory

Control theory already describes reference values, discrepancy, feedback, and corrective action (Carver & Scheier, 1982). The present framework focuses on several incompatible reference organizations, partial representation, differentiated responsibility and action locus, blocked environmental efficacy, and plural viable outcomes.

7.3. Attribution and locus of control

Attribution and locus-of-control theories already address cause, stability, controllability, and outcome contingency (Rotter, 1966; Weiner, 1985). The present framework proposes a multidimensional profile that distinguishes cause, responsibility, threat, possible action, and perceived control and follows its revision through feedback.

7.4. Regulatory flexibility and action crisis

Regulatory flexibility concerns context sensitivity, repertoire, and responsiveness to feedback (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). Action-crisis research studies conflict between continued goal pursuit and disengagement and its relation to stress and health-related outcomes (Ghassemi et al., 2017; Holding et al., 2021). The present framework includes conflicts not reducible to one goal and incorporates bodily state, independently assessed action affordance, relational constraint, and environmental transition.

7.5. Perseverative cognition and affect dynamics

Perseverative cognition can prolong activation beyond exposure (Brosschot et al., 2006). Rumination has been associated with delayed cardiovascular recovery and cortisol dynamics under specific designs and samples (Glynn et al., 2002; Shull et al., 2016; Rodriguez-Stanley et al., 2025). Affect-dynamics research distinguishes exposure, reactivity, recovery, and inertia, and emotional inertia is not equivalent to rumination (Kuppens et al., 2010; Koval et al., 2015).

The present unit is broader than affect or repetitive thought: it is a coupled conflict trajectory containing appraisal, allocation, representation, physiology, action, environment, and slow identity.

7.6. Event centrality

The Centrality of Event Scale measures how an event becomes a reference point for identity and subsequent interpretation (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). The present framework treats identity embedding as both a possible trajectory outcome and a slow constraint on future transitions.

7.7. Active and interoceptive inference

Active and interoceptive inference already connect latent-state estimation, bodily prediction, sensory evidence, action, emotion, and selfhood (Seth, 2013; Seth & Friston, 2016). The present framework is

not a probabilistic generative model. Its narrower domain is conflict among incompatible organizations, with explicit treatment of responsibility, power, relational conditions, plural viable outcomes, and social constraints.

7.8. Allostasis and dynamic resilience

Allostasis concerns adaptation through change, and allostatic load concerns cumulative multisystem burden (McEwen & Stellar, 1993; McEwen, 1998). Dynamic resilience research already treats resilience as process, trajectory, capacity, or system property; uses repeated perturbation designs; and models recovery through coupled or complex dynamics (Montpetit et al., 2010; Whitson et al., 2016; Gijzel et al., 2020; Walston et al., 2023; Lunansky et al., 2025).

The generic claim that recovery is conditional is not a VIVENS priority claim. A 2026 bioenergetic framework explicitly uses that formulation in relation to energetic limits of recovery (Tippairote et al., 2026).

8. Specific VIVENS Contribution

The framework does not claim discovery of appraisal, feedback, coping, attribution, control, interoception, active inference, flexibility, action crisis, rumination, event centrality, resilience, affective inertia, or allostatic burden.

Its proposed contribution is the conflict-specific integration of:

> ***incompatible organizations***
> ***+ multidimensional functional allocation***
> ***+ multidimensional representation***
> ***+ physiological readiness***
> ***+ automatic and deliberate response operations***
> ***+ enacted action***
> ***+ environmental transformation***
> ***+ material resources and power***
> ***+ slow identity and memory***
> ***+ conditional transition to plural viable states***

The framework earns scientific necessity only if these additions improve construct discrimination, prospective prediction, intervention selection, or mechanistic explanation beyond simpler established models.

9. Testable Propositions

Proposition 1 — Dynamic updating

Repeated within-person measures of updating should predict later trajectories better than static labels such as “internalizer,” “externalizer,” or habitual coping style.

Falsifier: static models perform equally or better in preregistered out-of-sample prediction at comparable complexity.

Proposition 2 — Environmental transition

Models containing independently assessed environmental state and environmental transition should predict coupled outcomes better than models containing only perceived context and person-level variables.

Falsifier: organism-only models perform equally well after complexity penalties.

Proposition 3 — Control–affordance interaction

Perceived control should have different consequences when an effective action option is independently assessed as available, unavailable, or socially prohibited.

Falsifier: independently assessed affordance does not modify the relation between perceived control and updating.

Proposition 4 — Allocation and representation

Reduced allocation and representation blocks should each add out-of-sample prediction beyond conventional appraisal, attribution, alexithymia, interoception, control, and coping measures.

Falsifier: neither block adds value after dimensionality and complexity are controlled.

Proposition 5 — Identity and reinstatement

Conflict-related identity embedding should predict cue-based reinstatement beyond event severity, current symptoms, rumination, and event centrality.

Falsifier: identity embedding adds no independent predictive information.

Proposition 6 — Conditional return

A person–environment interaction model should outperform a stable person-only parameter when predicting entry into a prespecified viable set.

Falsifier: a person-only model predicts equally well across contexts.

Proposition 7 — Structured asynchrony and path dependence

Behavioral, autonomic, endocrine, and identity-related change should not be adequately represented by one universal recovery parameter. True hysteresis, if present, should require path dependence rather than delayed linear recovery.

Falsifier: one recovery parameter explains all measured levels without meaningful predictive loss, and apparent path dependence disappears after continuing exposure and measurement error are modeled.

10. Initial Empirical Program

The full framework cannot be tested in one study.

10.1. Phase A: ecological mapping

A first observational study should examine everyday blocked-goal conflicts with potential for environmental change over 10–14 days.

Core measures:

- appraisal;
- reduced allocation profile;
- reduced representation profile;
- perceived control;
- independently assessed action affordance;

- enacted action;
- environmental response;
- rumination;
- affect;
- sleep;
- optional ambulatory cardiac indices.

The primary test is whether a person–environment transition model improves held-out prediction beyond appraisal, coping, action crisis, rumination, and person-only models.

Natural events occur at unequal intervals. Continuous-time approaches may be preferable when the interval between observations varies, while dynamic structural equation and state-space methods may be useful after the measurement model is established (de Haan-Rietdijk et al., 2017; Hamaker et al., 2018).

10.2. Phase B: controlled experiment

A mild yoked task should provide equivalent exposure with different action affordances:

1. effective action available;
2. a non-instrumental control cue without an effective response option;
3. distraction;
4. no additional transition option.

Outcomes may include operation selection, action execution, rumination, heart-rate recovery, heart-rate variability, and salivary cortisol where feasible. Exposure, timing, feedback quantity, and social contact should be matched as far as possible.

10.3. Candidate mechanism

"Blocked action" can mean externally verified unavailability, misperceived unavailability, execution failure, or conflict between actions. The initial mechanism should isolate one case:

> ***experimentally imposed absence of an effective response option despite continued action demand***
> ***→ perseverative cognitive–affective operation***
> ***→ delayed autonomic and endocrine recovery***

The chain is weakened if perseveration does not mediate the association, physiological recovery is unchanged, or the findings are explained by expectancy, support, exposure, sleep, or baseline physiology.

11. Biological and Oncological Boundary

The paper does not claim that unresolved conflict causes cancer, mutation, malignant transformation, or a specific disease.

Its biological claim is limited:

> ***Conflict-relevant coupled dynamics may participate in systemic regulation through candidate neural, autonomic, endocrine, behavioral, and relational pathways.***

The first candidate mechanism is restricted to action unavailability, perseverative operation, and

physiological recovery. More distant hypotheses involving tissue or cellular history belong to separate VIVENS studies and require independent evidence at every scale.

No psychological profile should be used to infer cancer risk, explain an individual tumor, assign responsibility to a patient, replace diagnosis, or discourage biomedical treatment.

12. VIVENS Ontological Interpretation

The empirical framework can be tested without accepting the VIVENS ontology.

The **SI** designates the integrated identity through which the organism experiences being alive. It is not an immaterial entity above the body, but an emergent organization materially realized through the organism.

Within the VIVENS architecture:

- **CFI** designates the field of functional integration through which multiple processes participate in a common organismic organization;
- **Ω** designates the regime of coherence within which the SI remains biologically viable.

These are theoretical constructs, not empirically identified biological objects.

The ontological reading of the coupled framework is recurrent rather than sovereign: the many constitute the organization through which the SI experiences conflict; response and action alter bodily and environmental conditions; those transformed conditions participate in the following organization through which the SI continues to experience reality.

Empirical formulation:

> ***The operational organization of a person becomes partially inferable from the coupled transitions through which conflict is allocated, represented, acted upon, followed by environmental consequences, and updated.***

VIVENS formulation:

> ***The operational ontology of the SI becomes visible in the recurrent destination that conflict acquires within the coupling between organism and reality.***

The two formulations are not epistemically equivalent.

13. Limitations, Epistemic Boundaries, and Ethics

The framework is broad and risks overfitting. Its notation is conceptual rather than a validated quantitative model and does not claim mathematical novelty over state-space, stochastic-reachability, control, or viability approaches. Its constructs may collapse into existing measures. System boundaries and viable sets require normative decisions. Environmental states may be difficult to assess independently of participants' reports. The current environmental representation is aggregate rather than a full multi-agent model; when another agent is central to the conflict, that agent's actions and observations may need to be modeled explicitly rather than absorbed into $\mathbf{w}_t$. Causal properties such as hysteresis, environmental efficacy, or partial independence from initiating conditions require intervention or strong quasi-experimental designs.

The following distinctions are mandatory:

- phenomenological description is not mechanism;
- appraisal is not necessarily conscious;
- observation is not latent state;

- perceived control is not independently assessed affordance;
- action preparation is not action execution;
- environmental constraint is not personal incapacity;
- correlation is not mediation;
- mediation is not complete causation;
- slow recovery is not hysteresis;
- resilience is not a moral quality;
- CFI, Ω, and SI are theoretical constructs;
- persistence is not personal failure;
- integration is not compliance with injustice;
- biological vulnerability is not responsibility.

The framework must not be used to blame ill people, infer hidden conflict from disease, replace clinical diagnosis, individualize social violence, classify calmness as superior integration, treat confrontation as inherently pathological, or moralize recovery speed.

14. Conclusion

Conflict does not occur solely inside an isolated person. It unfolds through a coupled system in which incompatible organizations are appraised, allocated, represented, embodied, acted upon, environmentally answered, and updated.

The framework distinguishes a latent organismic state, a slow memory–identity state, an environmental–relational state, response organization, enacted action, and imperfect observations. The environment modifies the organism; the organism organizes a response; prepared operations may or may not become action; action and external events modify the environment; and the transformed environment participates in the next organismic state.

The central construct is **conditional coupled return potential**:

> ***the probability that a defined organism–environment system will enter a prespecified set of viable configurations within a defined timescale, conditional on its starting state, perturbation, resources, constraints, and intervention.***

The empirical hypothesis is:

> ***When conflict-relevant coupled states repeatedly fail to update after relevant conditions change—or when the coupled system does not permit effective environmental transition—the response organization may continue beyond the circumstances that initially made it necessary.***

The organism may not lose coherence. The coupled system may preserve coherence around a response whose original relation to reality has changed.

The framework earns scientific value only if its components can be distinguished from established constructs, improve prediction outside the development sample, guide interventions, and support prespecified mechanisms.

VIVENS formulation:

> ***What the SI cannot relocate, represent, transform, or terminate—and what its world does not permit it to transform—may continue to organize the organism until a response to reality becomes a history governing the present.***

Publication Note

This manuscript is a conceptual research framework and reports no original participant data. Before submission to a journal or formal repository release, author affiliation, correspondence details, ORCID, funding statement, competing-interest statement, and any required disclosure concerning AI-assisted research or writing should be completed according to the destination platform's policy.

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